By Jan Rahn
Managing Editor

Perkins County residents who wish to eat organically grown vegetables, or have access to goat milk, lean pork, breads, eggs or jams, jellies, fudge and pickles need to look no farther than Double L Farm, owned and operated by Linda and Lance Heitman of Elsie.

"There is a growing movement in this country seeking organically raised foods, and we are happy to be a part of it," said Linda. "We enjoy our farm and providing for ourselves and others."

The Heitmans established their small diversified farm while living in Kansas for seven years.

They had fiber sheep, milk and meat goats, rabbits, free range chickens and a large market garden. Linda also had a line of jams, jellies and pickles—items similar to what is available from their farm at Elsie.

"One season I sold over 2,000 jars of jams, jellies and pickles," said Linda. "I had some seriously addicted bread and butter pickle customers."

The Heitmans came to Nebraska in 2004 and began Abundant Life Church. They closed it in 2008 and after wintering in South Dakota, moving to Texas to help a friend restart a church following Hurricane Ike and Lance doing a mission in Galveston, they returned to Elsie in June 2010. They have recently restarted Abundant Life Church there.

In September they purchased Alpine dairy goats and in December some Tamworth hogs.

"Our concerns over the cost and quality of food were main factors in deciding to change the focus of our little farm from sustaining our family to making our products available to the general public," said Linda.

She has begun bringing produce and baked goods to Grant each Friday and sets up a "farmer's market" in the turnaround on the west side of city park.

She would like to see more participation from local growers.

I really enjoy providing local food choices and am committed to seeing the Grant farmer's market continue and succeed, she said.

“We choose to grow only old heirloom, open pollinated varieties of vegetables because we were tired of hard, tasteless tomatoes that have been trucked for 1500 miles and picked unripe,” said Linda. “We choose our varieties based on flavor and hardiness to our climate, not shelf life and beauty.”

They deliver to North Platte, Wallace, Elsie, Madrid and Grant. Because their vision is to provide local products to local families, they do not sell large quantities to retail outlets.

“We would like to see our farm grow, but not to the scale it would take to sell to stores,” said Linda. In order to sell baked goods to retain outlets, they would also have to incur great expense to build a certified kitchen and hire employees. They can sell direct without this requirement. State law governs what can and cannot be sold at market. For instance, she can sell baked goods, jams, jellies, candies and fresh produce at a farmer’s market, but can only sell her pickles and other canned goods privately. State law also dictates that the milk must be picked up at the farm.

Linda is planning to add pies to her offering of baked goods this week.

“I use local products (for baking) as much as possible,” she said. “I am almost militant in my belief of ‘buy local or local won’t be there’!”

The Heitmans do not use pesticides, herbicides or chemical fertilizers. They apply the same philosophy to their animals. The goats are a hardy, gentle breed that provide naturally low-fat (2-3 percent) milkfat. The hogs are excellent mothers, very gentle, and thrive in outdoor operations. The drawback to the Tamworth hogs is their slow growth compared to modern cross-bred hogs.

They do not feed any antibiotics, growth hormones or genetically modified grains, supplementing the milo and oats purchased locally with lots of green vegetation.

They are taking orders now for their naturally raised hogs with anticipated pork processing and delivery in early November.

“We are eagerly anticipating filling our freezer (along with our customers’) this winter with lots of naturally lean, naturally raised pork,” said Linda. “We look at our customers as extended parts of our family—we want to provide the very best for our family and theirs.”

The Heitmans are members of the Perkins County Chamber and the University of Nebraska’s Buy Fresh Buy Local Program.

Linda handles the organizing, marketing, bookkeeping and kitchen products for Double L Farm. Lance takes care of the animals and handles the day-to-day operation. He has a CDL license and also does local trucking when needed.

The Heitmans–Linda from Houston, Lance from Wallace–have two children. Son Nicholas and wife and two sons recently moved to Elsie from Texas. He works at Applebee’s in North Platte and helps with deliveries there. Daughter Ruth Ann, eight years old, has just entered third grade at Perkins County Elementary. She loves having the animals and is a big helper with their care, wanting to become a vet when she grows up, said her mother.

Life at the Double L Farm isn’t all work and no play–Lance loves to hunt and fish and is an ardent fan of the Huskers and the Kansas City Chiefs.

Linda enjoys reading, baking, sewing, quilting, knitting, crocheting and weaving.

She has a custom hand quilting business and has designed a line of patterns. She has a website for her quilting business: www.lindashandquilting.com as well as a Facebook page.

To visit the website for Double L Farm, visit www.farmednaturally.com or check out their Facebook page, Double L Farm.

Visitors to the farm are welcome. From main street in Elsie, turn east on Madrid Street (also

known as the Paxton Road) and go to the second street which is Elsie Avenue, and turn right. The Heitmans can be reached by phone at 308-228-2632.